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The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in the Kingdoms of Pontus and Kommagene during the Roman Conquest

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Abstract

In 72-69 B.C., L. Lucullus successively captured the most important urban centres of the kingdom of Pontus, and Tigranocerta in Armenia. His army also operated in the kingdom of Commagene and in Upper Mesopotamia. Lucullus' military campaign was continued by Pompey. We come across incidental information about the scale of robbery and destruction committed by the Roman army (the statue of Autolykus by Sthenis in Sinope, the temple of Ma in Comana, the secret archives of Mithradates VI, the Roman library of Lucullus, the treasures of Darius the Achaemenid). Some objects of the plundered art appeared in public at the triumphal shows of wealth in Rome, which was perfunctorily documented by Pliny the Elder, Appianus of Alexandria and Plutarch (63 and 61 B.C.). Artworks were also acquired by functionaries of the occupying administration from urban communities and private persons through extortion and blackmail. The Roman lawyers and intellectuals worked out a set of skilful legal formulas to justify and legalise the plunder of cultural goods (*ius belli*, *monumentum imperatoris*, *ornamentum urbis*). Cicero, Livy and Plutarch never condemn the robbery of artworks and libraries if they were committed in the name of the Roman state. The fragmentary evidence testifies to the once flourishing literary circles of the kingdoms of Pontus and Commagene (Methrodorus of Scepsis, Athenion, the anonymous authors of inscriptions from Commagene, the epitaphs of the Bosphoran kingdom).

Keywords

Pontus, Kommagene, Plunder of Cultural Heritage, Ancient Eastern Mediterranean Art, Roman Conquest

In 73 B.C., Lucullus besieged Cyzicus and pursued Mithradates VI, king of Pontus, who withdrew to the East. The Roman army under the command of Lucullus and his legates marked its route by fire and sword. In 72/1 B.C., after a longer siege the Romans captured Amisos and Kabeira on the Lycus River. In 70 B.C., they seized the capital cities of the Pontic kingdom of Amaseia and Sinope. In 69 B.C., they attacked the towns and strong-

holds in Upper Mesopotamia. In the same year Tigranocerta fell into the Roman hands, however, they proved unable to capture Artaxata (Will 1967/2: 411ff.).

In Sinope the conquerors came into the possession of a sacred image of Autolycus, the legendary founder of Sinope, “the work of Sthennis from Olynthos and one of his masterpieces” (Plu. *Luc.* 23,4; Str. 12,3,11 [546]).¹ The statue was found on the beach, carefully prepared for evacuation (App. *Mith.* 83, (371)). The Romans also confiscated a map of the world by Billaros, a masterpiece of ancient craftsmanship (Str. 12,3,11) (Pape 1975: 22). It might have been a model for the later famous map of Agrippa, a proud showpiece of Roman cartography. In 72 B.C., another high-ranking officer of Lucullus, M. Aurelius Cotta, plundered the harbour town of Heraclea Pontica and confiscated the statue of Heracles adorned with a golden mace, a bow and arrows. The image of the town’s mythical founder, one of the Argonauts, stood on the agora of Heraclea (Pape 1975: 195; 70 B.C. ; Will 1967, 2, 72 B.C.).

In 69 B.C., Lucullus’ division stormed and plundered Tigranocerta¹ ἡ πόλις μεστή ἀναθημάτων (full of votive offerings) (Plu. *Luc.* 26,2). Plutarch emphasised the wealth of the town, where “every private person and every prince vied with the king in contributing to its increase and adornment” (Plu. *Luc.* 26,2). It is particularly interesting to read in Plutarch’s biography of Lucullus that a company of dramatic actors invited by King Tigranes for the dedication ceremony of a theatre also made up a part of the immense Roman booty (Plu. *Luc.* 29,3-4; App. *Mithr.* 2). Tigranes’ royal diadem was later seen in Lucullus’ hands (Plu. *Luc.* 28,6; App. *Mithr.* 86). The carriages and camels of Lucullus were loaded with golden beakers studded with precious stones (Plu. *Luc.* 34,3). After Lucullus had been recalled to Rome by his envious and influential adversaries in the Senate, Pompey, who replaced him, continued the plunder of the Graeco-Oriental kingdoms in Anatolia and Levant. Judging by the wealth of his triumph, which surpassed all the triumphs, ever seen in Rome, the scale of the robberies committed by Pompey must have been even larger than those perpetrated by his predecessor.

¹ Jucker 1950: 67f.; Pape 1975: 23; Overbeck 1868: 1345-1349; Vollkommer 2007: 858-860; Hebert 1989: 249, 274, 289, 351, 432, 438.

Occasionally we hear of royal libraries and archives. In Kainon the Roman thieves found royal memoirs (ὑπομνηματα), which were apparently subsequently destroyed, because we do not know anything about them from the later literary tradition. Plutarch mentioned dream books (κρίσεις ἐνυπνίων) in the same archives of Kainon. These had a chance to survive and influence the later art of the Greek *oniocritica*. The invaders also confiscated the king's private correspondence, which contained the love letters of Monime (ἀναγεγραμμένοι) (Plu. *Pomp.* 37). Lucullus also confiscated the secret archives of Mithradates VI in an unspecified place (τῶν ἀπορρήτων αὐτοῦ γραμμάτων ἀλόντων) (Plu. *Luc.* 22,4). Plutarch referred to a magnificent library of Greek books, which was established by Lucullus in Rome (τῶν βιβλίων κατασκευή) (Plut. *Luc.* 42). Undoubtedly Lucullus brought it from the Pontic kingdom of Mithradates VI, who was famous for his love of the Greek culture (App. *Mithr.* 112,550).

Stratonike, the wife of Mithradates VI, handed over a royal stronghold to Pompey. The Romans found a large amount of money there stored in bronze vessels (App. *Mith.* 107,503–4). Although it sounds hardly credible, Th. Reinach published a big bronze vase with the inscription of Mithradates VI. The vase was found in Anzio in the 18th century (Reinach 1895: 284). However, it was another royal treasure, which won proverbial fame—the treasure of Talaura. It fell into the hands of the greedy conqueror Pompey. Appian of Alexandria listed 2000 chalices of onyx stone, drinking pots, *psykters* (wine coolers), drinking horns, *klinai* and chairs, horse harnesses and breast bands, all studded with precious stones. Some of those treasures were inherited of Darius, the son of Hystaspes. Consequently it was part of the legendary treasures of the Achaemenids (App. *Mith.* 115,563–3) (Pape 1975: 24).² In his royal propaganda Mithradates VI prided himself on being the sixteenth descendant of Darius (App. *Mithr.* 112,540). Appian enumerated artworks, precious stones, women's jewelry and a large amount of money (App. *Mith.* 23,93). He emphasised that part of the treasure of Talaura was commissioned by the connoisseur king himself, who was renowned for his sensitivity to beauty, his taste for interior decoration (App. *Mith.* 115, 563–4). The coins of the Pontic Kings from the 2nd century B.C. and, I think, also of Mithradates VI, which belong to

² Symphorion with the royal treasures and archives (Cass. Dio 37,7,7).

the most impressive coins, which have been ever struck, corroborate Ap-pian's opinion (Seltman 1965, Pl. LVII 2,3).³ Mithradates VI spoke many languages. He was a patron of the arts and sciences. Compared with him Sulla, Lucullus and Pompey were barbarian semi-illiterates.

Plundered works of art soon became objects of trade, which cannot be labelled any otherwise than criminal. This is the usual story of war and robbery. A royal sword-belt of great value, a masterpiece of Anatolian jewellers, was stolen by one of Pompey's officers and sold to Ariarathes, King of Cappadocia (Plu. *Pomp.* 42,3), while the royal tiara (χίταρις), an unparalleled work of craftsmanship, was secretly offered to Sulla's son (ibid.). Artworks and valuable objects of craftsmanship were acquired not only as war trophies and robberies. We are sometimes informed, even if only perfunctorily, of acts of criminal extortion and blackmail committed on Anatolian urban communities, which were burdened with wartime contributions or were unable to pay off the taxes imposed by the Roman state. We learn that many communities in Anatolia and on the Aegean coast were plundered and reduced to slavery by the tax-collectors and money-lenders. As a result these urban communities were compelled to sell their own votive offerings, pictures by great masters from their own galleries and even the sacred idols of their gods (ἀναθήματα, γραφάς, ἱερὸς ἀνδριάντας) (Plut. *Luc.* 20,1) (Pape 1975: 114, n. 185). Saying that the tax-collectors were like "harpies snatching the people's food" Plutarch probably repeated words already in colloquial usage during the Mithridatic wars; the phrase had in all likelihood been documented by one of Plutarch's carefully studied sources from the epoch (ὥσπερ Ἀρπυίας τὴν τροφὴν ἀρπάζοντας) (Plu. *Luc.* 8,5-6). This cowardly practice of making the weak and defenceless urban communities auction off their artworks was widespread in the 1st century B.C. .

Some of the plundered art appeared in public at triumphal shows of wealth in Rome. In his triumph of 63 B.C., Lucullus showed Roman public a golden statue of Mithradates VI, two metres high, his shield studded with jewels, silver vessels, and golden chalices, which were carried in

³ Cf. "Les rois du Pont... introduisent sur leurs pièces des légendes en langue indigène, ce qui prouve aussi la vitalité de celles-ci. The coinage of the Seleucids and Lagids was exclusively struck with the Greek characters" (Préaux 1978: 555).

twenty lecticas, while mules carried eight costly *klinai* (Plu. *Luc.* 27,3-4) (αὐτοῦ δὲ Μιθριδάτου χρύσεος ἐξάπους κολοσσός. καὶ θυρεός τις διάλιθος. καὶ φορήματα εἴκοσι μὲν ἀργυρῶν σκευῶν. χρυσῶν δ' ἐκπωμάτων ... ἡμίονοι δ' ὀκτὼ κλῖνας χρυσᾶς εφερον) (Pape 1975: 23). However, it was the triumphal show of Pompey in 61 B.C., which overshadowed all the other triumphs ever been witnessed in Rome by its wealth and display of luxury (Jucker 1950: 60). The Roman people had a chance to see lecticas and carriages filled with gold and precious objects, the bed of Darius, the ancient king of Persia, the throne of Mithradates VI, his sceptre and his golden statue eight cubits high (more than three metres). During the spectacle Pompey wore Alexander the Great's royal coat, which was found in the treasury of the king of Pontus (App. *Mith.* 116,570). Pliny the Elder added the silver statues of Eupator, and his ancestors Pharnaces I (c. 185-170 B.C.) and Mithradates V Euergetes (c. 150-121 B.C.) (Plin. *HN* 33,154), three golden idols of gods and a mosaic made of precious stones (ibid. 37,14) to Pompey's triumphal list.

We sometimes get incidental information about other precious objects, which were stolen by Lucullus and Pompey in Pontus or in the Levant, and subsequently brought to Italy. The statue of *Hercules tunicatus*, Hercules in the gown of Nessos, being burnt alive with his face distorted by pain (by an unknown old master) was dedicated by Lucullus and his son at the Rostra on the Forum Romanum (Plin. *HN* 34,93).⁴ The famous gardens of Lucullus in Rome (*Horti Luculliani*), which he purchased in 60 B.C., were adorned with the artworks sequestered in Anatolia (Plut. *Luc.* 39,2) (Pape 1975: 167; Jucker 1950: 46, n. 4, Grimal 1969: 34). After 200 years Plutarch still wrote of Lucullus with admiration about "his costly edifices, his ambulatories and bath, and still more his paintings and statues (γραφὰς καὶ ἀνδριάωτας) ... splendid wealth, which he accumulated from his campaigns" (Plu. *Luc.* 29,2). Only to add: "Even now, when luxury was increased so much, the gardens of Lucullus are counted among the most costly of the imperial gardens" (Kaster 1973). In his museography of Rome Pliny the Elder observed that Mummius filled Rome with sculptures after his conquest of Achaia and added that *multa (signa) et Luculli invexere*,

⁴ Cf. *Auctoris Incerti ... torva facie, sentiensque suprema tunicae... tituli: L. Luculli de manubiis, alter pupillum Luculli filium ex S. C. dedicasse* (Plin. *HN* 34, 93; Pape 1975 : 23, 47ff.).

the Luculli brothers also brought over a large number of statues (Plin. *HN* 34,36). So, we are not surprised to hear of Oriental purple tapestries and carpets and also of beakers studded with precious stones in Lucullus' opulent villa (Plu. *Luc.* 40) (στρωμαῖς ἀλουργέσι καὶ διαλίθοις ἐκπώμασι), on the north slope of Tusculum facing the city of Rome. Cicero, his neighbour, must have envied Lucullus his gorgeous art collections. He mentioned Lucullus' villa time and again in his writings (*leg.* 3,30; *fin.* 2,107) (Pape 1975: 114, n. 186). Cicero's private art gallery accumulated by purchases on the antiquarian market was by no means comparable with the collections brought to Rome by Lucullus.

If L. Urlichs was right (1886) in his supposition that Asinius Pollio bought a large part of Lucullus' art collection at auction after the death of Lucullus' son in the Battle of Philippi, we can enrich our list of robberies committed in Pontus by a number of other artworks (Jucker 1950: 69). Fortunately Pollio's art galleries belong to the best known Roman museums. Pliny the Elder documented the following artworks put on display in the buildings and porticos raised by Pollio, and probably located mostly in the museum by his library: the statue of Aphrodite by Cephisodotus (*HN* 36,24),⁵ Arcesilas' Centaurs with Nymphs on their backs (*HN* 36,33),⁶ Thespiades of Cleomenes, Oceanus and Zeus by Heniochos (*ibid.*);⁷ the Nymphs of Stephanus, Hermerotes by Tauriscus of Tralleis (*ibid.*);⁸ Zeus Xenios by Papylos, the student of Praxiteles;⁹ Dionysos by Eutychides (*HN*

⁵ In all likelihood Pliny the Elder referred to the famous Aphrodite, which we know from a number of Roman time copies. She was labelled *Venus Capitolina*. The ashamed *Capitoline Venus*, probably a second ingenious creation of a nude beauty in the Classical Antiquity to the *Praxitelean Cnidian Aphrodite*, was worth a royal collection. The statue must have been very expensive, if at all available on the antiquarian market (Corso 1992: 131-157).

⁶ Arkesilaos belonged to the clients of L. Lucullus, the son of L. Licinius Lucullus (Overbeck 1868: 2268-2270).

⁷ Heniochos (Cod. Bambergensis), Entochos (other manuscripts), corrected by K. Urlichs to Antiochos, Antiochos (III), Vollkommer 2007: 54-55), perhaps identic with Antiochos (IV), the son of Demetrios of Antioch, E. Paul, Antiochos (IV).

⁸ Tauriskos (II) from Tralleis in Caria, 2nd century B.C., (Vollkommer 2007: 870).

⁹ It is not clear, if Papylos actually was a student of Praxiteles (2nd half of the 4th century B.C.), or a sculptor from the circle of Asinius Pollio.

36,34),¹⁰ Amphion, Zetos and Dirke by Apollonius and Tauriscus, the sculptural group sequestered in Rhodes (*HN* 36,33-4). It was confiscated by Cassius Longinus in Rhodes, and transported to Rome by Mark Antony. Pliny the Elder also referred to *canephores* (*HN* 36,25) and a boy with a cup by Scopas (*HN* 36,22).¹¹ Some of these sculptures, particularly by the late Hellenist masters, might have been purchased by Lucullus on the Roman antiquarian market (Arkesilaos, Stephanus). Even so, he must have paid with the money of Mithradates VI and king Tigranes of Armenia.

In the art gallery of the Porticus Pompei the visitor had a chance to contemplate such masterpieces of the Greek art as the hoplite of Polygnottus (*HN* 35,58-9);¹² Cadmus and Europa by Antiphilus (*HN* 35,114),¹³ or Pausias' large scale painting, which pictured the immolation of oxen (*HN* 35,126); Nicias' portrait of Alexander the Great and his paintings of Andromeda and Io (*HN* 35,132);¹⁴ a seated portrait of Calypso, a princess from

¹⁰ Most probably a marble statue by Eutychides from Sikyon, a student of Lysippos (early 3rd century B.C.). Eutychides was one of the most popular sculptors of the Hellenistic period, the author of Tyche of Antioch, a masterpiece of sculpture in bronze, which must have been commissioned by Seleucus I, the founder of Antiochia on the River Orontes, 301/300 B.C., for the newly founded city (Vollkommer 2007: 242-245).

¹¹ Scopas of Paros, one of the most highly valued of all the Greek sculptors by the Roman viewers and art collectors, 380-330/320 B.C. (Vollkommer 2007: 827-833).

¹² Polignotus was one of the most valued Greek painters in the late Hellenistic and Roman times.

¹³ The Europa painting became synonymous with the Porticus Pompei (Mart. *epigr.* 2,14,3); the Roman museums kept a number of paintings of Europas, which are documented by the literary and iconographic sources (Ov. *Met.* 2,873-6; Ov. *Fasti* 5,606ff.; Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Cleitophon*, Prologue). A gorgeous Europa mosaic from Praeneste is probably a copy of Antiphilus' Europa mentioned by Pliny the Elder (*HN* 35,114). The painting may be also reflected in Moschus' description of Europa (for bibliography and discussion on the Europa paintings in the Roman art galleries, see Polański 2002: 67-88).

¹⁴ Nikias worked for Alexander the Great and Ptolemy I. His Hyakinthos was confiscated by Octavian Augustus in Alexandria and transported to Rome, where the painting adorned the Temple of Divus Augustus (Paus. 3,19,4; Overbeck 1868: 181). Andromeda and Io can be identified with a high degree of certainty in numerous extant fresco copies, which adorn walls of the Campanian buried towns and in Rome (Casa dei Dioscuri, Casa dei Cinque Scheletri, Casa del Principe di Montenegro, now in the National Museum of

the East (*ibid.*). The Porticus Pompei was constructed after Pompey's triumph of 61 B.C. and consecrated in 55 B.C. together with the theatre. Its painting collection, which we know only from Pliny the Elder's very selective catalogue looks enchanting. The columned porticoes offered the Roman viewer a selection of the most valued old masters of Classical Antiquity. Painters like Polygnotus were held only by the most admired and frequented art galleries of the Mediterranean like the Propylaea and the Painted Stoa in Athens or the Lesche of the Cnidiads in Delphoi. Likewise Antiphilus, a court painter of Ptolemy I. Pliny the Elder included him in a carefully selected list of the best Greek painters (*HN* 35,138).¹⁵ Antiphilus' small size genre scenes and still life were the dream of the wealthiest Roman art collectors. It is interesting to observe in this context that Mithradates had good relations with the royal house of Alexandria. In 84 B.C. he married his daughter Mithradatis to Ptolemy XII, and four years later his second daughter Nysa to Ptolemy of Cyprus. Pausias was one of the most distinguished representatives of the painting school of Sikyon. Pliny the Elder admires his *boum immolatio*, Pausanias his Methe from the Tholos of Epidauros (2, 27, 3). Lucullus paid a lot of money for a copy of Pausias' famous *stephanopolis* (Plin. *HN* 35,126).¹⁶ Nicias of Athens's paintings were commissioned by Alexander the Great and Ptolemy I. His Young Hyacinthus, which was confiscated in Alexandria in 30 B.C., became one of Octavian Augustus' choice paintings. The monumental architectural complex of the Porticus Pompei was built for the money and adorned with artworks confiscated in the kingdom of Pontus. Myro's Heracles was put on display in Pompey's temple at the Circus Maximus (Plin. *HN* 34,57). It is difficult to say anything of the museographic history of these masterpieces. The paintings by Nicias, Antiphilus or Pausias, or the works of Myro were synonymous with wealth. They were so expensive that they were not traded on the antiquarian market. They must have originally been kept in the royal galleries of wealthy monarchs like Mithradates VI,

Naples; Casa di Livia, Macellum in Pompeii) (see Polański 2002: 89-116, with bibliography and discussion).

¹⁵ Varro compared him to Lysippus (*rust.* 3,3,2; Overbeck 1868: 1512); Theon drew a parallel between him and Apelles and Protogenes (*Progymnasmata* 1); Petronius to Philoxenus of Eretria (*Satiricon* 2, 9).

¹⁶ Poor Horace could only sigh in admiration of Pausias' perfect tabellae (*Sat.* 2,7,95).

Attalus III, the Seleucids or Ptolemies, and appeared in Rome in outcome of robbery or extortion. In my opinion Pompey plundered them from the art galleries of the Kingdom of Pontus and in Syria from the palaces of the Seleucids. Pompey's biography does not allow for other explanations. He could not have found Nicias', Pausias' or Antiphilus' paintings in the house of Sertorius, who lived the life of a guerilla in the mountains of Spain; nor from the tents of Spartacus and his men. Only rarely do we come across information as exact as this, which says that Pompey owned a collection of gems, once the property of Mithradates VI (Jucker 1950: 66, n. 3; cf. Suet. *Caes.* 47; Furtwängler 1900: 304).

M. Pape drew our attention to an essential and important factor in the history of the plundered art. She aptly remarked that a large part of the artworks made of precious metals and displayed in triumphal celebrations in Rome, was subsequently melted down (Pape 1975: 57). Some of them might have been sold at auction to cover the cost of the wars, others simply shared out between generals and their officers (*ibid.* : 58).

As regards Pontus we are able to collect some valuable information from the literary sources, even if it is scattered and fragmentary. However, we have no archaeology of Hellenistic Amaseia, Sinope, Amisos or Heracleia, which now lie under later towns.¹⁷ In the case of Kommagene the situation is quite the opposite. We have access to the still impressive archaeological sites of the royal sanctuaries of Antioch I Epiphanes (c. 69-38 B.C.) in Arsameia on Nymphaios and Nemrud Dagħ, and the *hierotheriesion* in Kara Kuş raised by Mithradates II, and Sesöñk.

The extensive royal inscriptions commissioned by Antioch I Epiphanes, probably in part composed by the king himself, testify to a sophisticated Graeco-Iranian cultural milieu. The monumental, as well as minor scale sculpture in the round, and the reliefs, which are remarkable for their fascinating blend of Iranian and Hellenic artistic traditions, speak in the best possible way of the anonymous sculptors who worked in the studios of Antioch I Epiphanes (Dörrie 1964; Waldmann 1973). They were great sculptors and excellent stonemasons. They created their own unique style, their own Graeco-Iranian iconography, and their own un-

¹⁷ The fieldworks in Heracleia Pontica were carried out by Hoepfner/Dörner 1961/62: 583ff.

paralleled aesthetics. The traveller who faced the monumental galleries of gods on Nemrud Dagħ or has seen the royal portrait in the old museum of Gaziantep has no doubt of this.

Julia Balbilla, a late descendant of Antioch I Epiphanes, was considered the Sappho of the Hadrianic times. In her charming Eolic poems incised on the Colossus of Memnon Balbilla takes great pride in her royal ancestors. Her mother was a princess of the blood, and her grandfather Balbillos was a man at the royal court (*Colosse* 29, vv. 15-19). Not incidentally perhaps she draws a distant allusion to the sacrilegious acts of destruction committed by the conquerors in the sanctuaries of her native country, when she refers to the impious, barbarous and pitiless King Cambyzes, who first mutilated and then butchered the sacred bull Apis (*Colosse* 29, vv. 9-10) (Bernand 1960: 28-32). Her poems also testify to the sophisticated cultural milieu of the royal court of Kommagene. The royal patronage embraced rhetoricians, philosophers, poets, architects, sculptors, priests and theologians, and in all likelihood also historians of the dynasty. This was all brutally destroyed by the Roman invaders.

Arsameia on Nymphaios shows traces of intentional and systematic destruction of the royal monuments, which is still visible even after 2000 years. The stones from the grave chamber of Isias, Antiochis and Ake in Kara Kuş were recycled by the Roman engineers to construct a bridge over Chabinas (mid 1st century A.D.) (Wagner 1983: 195). The bridge still hangs over a mountainous valley in a wild and impressive landscape over a gorge on the river. The plunder of burial grounds was a habit of the Roman conquerors in the 2nd/1st century B.C. M. Agrippa ordered the removal of a monumental stone lion, which adorned a grave in Lampsacus (Lapseki) and its transportation to Rome, where it decorated his newly constructed *thermae* (Str. 13,1,19) (Pape 1975: 80, 192; Hülsen 1910).

The ultimate aim of the destruction of inscriptions is to destroy memory. The very name of Arsameia has disappeared from the written documents of the imperial period. It remained completely forgotten until the day when the great Arsameian inscriptions were rediscovered and read anew (Wagner 1983: 195). It is interesting to observe that the new Roman rulers closed down or destroyed the old Iranian sanctuaries, while at the same time supporting the Aramaic centres of religious worship in Lacotena (Direk Kale) and Doliche (Dülük), as if they were worried that

the sanctuaries raised by the Orontids might become hotbeds of anti-Roman resistance. When did the Romans destroy Arsameia on Nymphaios? In 17 A.D. or in 72 A.D.? So far we have no clues to answer this question.

Roman lawyers joined in a common effort with intellectuals to work out a set of principles, which were regularly applied to all the cases of looting, temples included. We cannot forget that the majority of bronze and marble statues in Italy came from looted temples (Pape 1975: 36). This is clear to the reader of Pliny the Elder's museography of Rome. The prevailing majority of the statues in Pliny's catalogues of the Roman antiquities must have been originally either sacred idols, which had once been removed from temples, or components of religious architectural decoration, e. g. acroteria or tympanon statues. The looting of temples of the foreign gods was not regarded as sacrilegious (Jucker 1950: 88; Pape 1975: 36). In other words any barbarous act of plunder committed in sanctuaries in the East was dressed in the exact and linguistically clear legal Latin, the precision of which we so like to praise: *sepulchra hostium religiosa nobis non sunt. Ideoque lapides inde sublato in quamlibet usum convertere possumus* (Iulius Paulus, *Digesta* 47,12,4). The skilful phraseology, coined by Roman lawyers and employed by Cicero, one of the most gifted representatives of the Roman judicial class, such as *monumentum imperatoris*, or *ornamentum urbis* was used for decades to justify the plunder of cultural heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean, plunder, which reached a historic climax in the 1st century B.C. Cicero never condemns the robbery of artworks and other cultural goods if committed on behalf of the Roman state. His shameless hypocrisy throws a shadow of silence and oblivion on the brutal elimination of the entire cultural world of the kingdoms of the Attalids, of Pontus and Kommagene.

It is intriguing to see the faces of the defeated, which occasionally appear in the Graeco-Roman letters. Polybius remarked that the robbery of artworks instigates anger and hatred in the defeated, in particular when they see their property in the capital city of their conquerors (Polyb. 9,10,6). Cicero, carried too far by his prosecutor's anger, turns against the accused to tell us a moving story of tears shed by the people who come to Rome from Greece and Asia Minor, when they witness the sacred images of gods from their temples in the Forum Romanum (Cic. *Verr.* 2,1,59; see also Pape 1975: 82, n. 48, 137).

Pliny the Elder quoted Methrodorus of Scepsis, saying that in 264 B.C. the Romans captured Volsinii, where they confiscated 2000 bronze statues. This robbery was the only reason for the attack (Plin. *HN* 34,34; Pape 1975: 86). Methrodorus of Scepsis was one of the intellectuals who gathered at the court of Mithridates VI. Plutarch described him as ἀνὴρ ... πολυμαθής (Plu. *Luc.* 22,2). Here in Pliny's citation we probably find a unique opportunity to read a passage from the lost tradition of the Greek anti-Roman historiography, poetry and rhetoric. Methrodorus' words were not a propaganda slogan. He must have drawn on trustworthy historical sources. An inscription on the base of a statue found in Arena di San Ombono commemorates the seizure of Volsinii by M. Fulvius Flaccus, the consul of 264 B.C. (Pape 1975: 86, n. 66, 119, n. 69, 139; Torelli 1968: 71-75). In the light of this inscription the evidence adduced by Methrodorus cannot be regarded as a rhetorical fabrication by one *misoromaios* (cf. Jucker 1950: 49), which may be translated as an insane fanatic, as he was labelled by the Romans. In this way we have reached the difficult problem of the alternative, Oriental, anti-Roman literary, artistic and historical tradition, which confronted the invaders from the West. We know very little about the intellectuals who surrounded Mithradates VI. The information is dispersed, fragmentary and mostly distorted by the biased and selective transmission. We are informed of Diodorus of Adramyttion, an academic philosopher and a supporter of Mithradates VI (Str. 13, 1, 66; Deininger 1971: 251). Athenion was a peripatetic philosopher and leader of the anti-Roman uprising in Athens 88 B.C. He was also a supporter of the king of Pontus. Poseidonius quoted Athenion saying that when the Romans came, they would close down the sanctuaries, the gymnasia would die out, while the philosophers would fall silent (Athen. 5,213D; Deininger 1971: 254ff.). We can hardly deny that he was right. Apellikon of Teos, another peripatetic philosopher, collaborated with Athenion. After Athenion's military defeat his post was taken by Aristion, an Athenian Epicurean philosopher and political emigrant from Roman-controlled Athens, who found asylum and patronage at the court of Mithradates VI (Deininger 1971: 255f.). We also hear of Amphicrates of Athens. Plutarch tells his story in a few brief words using highly enigmatic language: λέγεται γὰρ φύγειν αὐτὸν εἰς Σελεύκειαν (Plu. *Luc.* 22,5). What does it mean "it is said that he left for Seleukeia"? Seleukeia was a big Greek city in Parthian

Mesopotamia. Later Amphicrates found asylum at the side of Cleopatra, the wife of Tigranes, that is at the court of the kings of Armenia. It is difficult to make a story out of the information transmitted by Plutarch. Plutarch's account sounds self-contradictory.¹⁸ Whatever the truth, it seems clear that Amphicrates escaped from Athens when he found himself endangered by the Romans and successively found asylum first in Parthia and later at the Armenian royal court.

There are a number of studies, which have contributed to the research on the alternative, Greek and Oriental literary and artistic traditions. H. Fuchs (1938) in his book, which marked a milestone in the 20th century humanities, focused on the Oriental cultural resistance to the Roman dominance. He related the earliest known *Oracula Sibyllina* to Mithradates VI and his literary circle. J. Deininger (1971) mainly focused on the Balkan Greeks, however the last chapter of his assiduously written and captivating book refers to the first Mithridatic war. M. Pape (1975) discussed the robbery of artworks mostly in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. W. Speyer (1978) meticulously collected scattered pieces of evidence, which refer to the Graeco-Roman censored literature. In a minor but valuable study R. Koch-Piettre (2005) discussed the circle of Stoic philosophers at the court of the Seleucids. A. Twardecki has recently presented his doctoral dissertation on poetic epitaphs from the Bosphorus kingdom. A number of them can be dated to the period of Mithradates VI. They supplement the evidence collected by Fuchs and enrich our knowledge of the literary culture of the Pontus kingdom.

In this way we are gradually regaining an awareness of the lost heritage of great cultural, artistic, philosophical, literary and religious centres, which were intentionally destroyed in a concerted effort by the Roman bureaucrats and military men. We are regaining that tradition as if from below a tombstone, the stone slab of silence, intentional destruction, premeditated devastation; and we are retrieving the earlier, indigenous tradition, which was destined by the invaders to be forgotten forever.

¹⁸ Plutarch's words that Amphicrates fell into disfavour with the king and ἐτελεύτησε δὲ παρὰ τῷ Τιγράνῃ (*Luc.* 22,5) sound esopic. Did he mean that Amphicrates died at the side, in the presence of or at the court of Tigranes? Amphicrates was buried with great honours in Armenia.

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